

Korean War Veteran

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Commonwealth Nations Revisit Program

The troops are proud to be back in Korea

They're in their 80's, but watch them stride so proudly as best they can in the land where they fought in their youth to defend a fledgling nation and serve their own countries with life and limb.

How much one of them might give to once again walk, even for a day or a few hours, as he was then, bold, cocky, strong as nails, putting life on the line, but being imbued with a solidness of character that could be forged in no other place, in no other way.

But this came close to it!



On their first morning in Korea the veterans and their escorts paid respects at the National Cemetery of Korea in Seoul, and are shown here in their departure photograph, before proceeding to the War Memorial of Korea to pay respects to Fallen Comrades in the Hall of Remembrance. They then participated in a news conference in which British Veteran William Speakman VC JP discussed his decision to donate his medals, including the Victoria Cross, to the people of Korea.

It was an exhilarating whirlwind day but they were up to it and did not miss one eyblink of the exciting programs – or the warmth and adulation of the Korean People, which was showered upon all of them. Or the magnificent cuisine at the five-star Lotte World Hotel where they were quartered.



At the War Memorial of Korea in Seoul, veterans first paid homage to Fallen Comrades at the various wall markers in the Hall of Remembrance. This was followed by participation in a news conference in which William Speakman VC JP discussed why he was presenting his medals to the Korean People.



He said emphatically that he hoped it would be a reminder for the young people of him and all of the servicemen from the countries that provided armed forces to defend their country so long ago.

He said that he was unequivocally proud of the South Korean people for the way that the nation has recovered and so tremendously advanced since the end of the war. He implored them all to take great pride in those achievements, and attested that he and every other veteran was proud of them for what they had done.

Finally, he said that when he has passed away, he wants his ashes to be buried in no-man's land in the Demilitarized Zone, close to the place where he fought during the Second Battle of Mariyang San, for which action he was awarded the Victoria Cross.

Click on this link to view a short video outtake from Mr. Speakman's remarks.

<https://youtu.be/tvWemgcwmjY>

Then it was time to prepare for the traditional Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs Thank You Banquet. This year, it was held at the start of the revisit program, instead of at the end.

This adjustment was made because Minister Park Sung Choon was scheduled to fly to Turkey on April 22nd to participate in services that marked the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Gallipoli.



The veterans entered the banquet venue in the Lotte World Hotel, walking over the sumptuous carpeting to pass through a cordon of ROK Army Honour Guards.



Minister Park Sung Choon gave William Speakman an honoured position at his right hand at the VIP table, where several other dignitaries, including the Ambassadors of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom were also seated.



An emotional moment as William Speakman VC turns over his cherished medals to Minister Park Sung Choon who will in turn present them to the War Memorial of Korea for permanent display. Thousands of school children from Korea and Japan visit the memorial every year. Minister Park, who is a retired lieutenant general of the ROK Army, understand soldiers – and soldiers' honour.



Star studded group gathered to honour William Speakman VC, and all of the other veterans. Minister Park Sung Choon is holding the medals that Mr. Speakman has donated to the Republic of Korea and to Mr. Speakman's right is Terry Price, trustee and administrator of the British Korean War Veterans Association, of which Mr. Speakman is the national president. Mr. Price is holding a portrait of Mr. Speakman, a gift from the MPVA. Honouring them are (standing, from left) Mr. Chi Kap Chong, chairman of the United Nations Korean War Allies Association; General Park Se Hwan, chairman of the ROK Korean War Veterans Association; Bill Paterson, Australian Ambassador; Charles Hay, British Ambassador; Eric Walsh, Canadian Ambassador; Clare Fearnley, New Zealand Ambassador and Brigadier Andrew Cliffe, the British Defence Attache.



Minister Park always enjoys presenting Ambassador for Peace Medals to veterans who have returned to Korea for the first time since they served in the Korean War. This veteran from New Zealand wears the insignia of “K Corps,” and also the Korean War Service Medal that was awarded to all UN servicemen by Korea’s first president, Syngman Rhee. New Zealand is the only Commonwealth nation that has formally authorized veterans to wear the medal along with those issued by their own country.



Minister Park shakes hands with Canadian Veteran Walter Robson, after awarding him the Ambassador for Peace Medal.



A beautiful end to the evening. As the banquet festivities wind down, members of the famous Little Angels song group go table to table, distributing roses to the veterans.



The brains behind the Korean War Veterans Revisit program. Usually always working behind the scenes, except for an appearance here and there as required, the staff of the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs comes forward at the Thank You Banquet for Commonwealth Veterans and joins with Minister Park Sung Choon, Director General Park Jongwang, and Director of International Operations, Yongjin Jeon. Shown above are (from left) Deputy Director Ms. Kang; Interpreter Mr. Kim; Director Jeon; Director General Park; Minister Park Sung Choon; Miss Kim; Assistant Director Ms. Shin, Assistant Director Miss Kim and Assistant Deputy Director Mr. Han. Not present is Deputy Director Ms. Hong, who presently is understudying Australia's Department of Veterans Affairs.

While the banquet kept Minister Park up late, and he thoroughly enjoyed being with all of the veterans, he was off to Turkey the next morning to participate in commemoration ceremonies marking the 100th anniversary of the first year of the Gallipoli campaign in World War One.